

Fighting “Zombie Homes” is major priority at Town Hall

As summer moves along, the growing grass of abandoned homes in Clarence quickly becomes noticeable. Although our Town Departments work hard to deal with these issues - most neighborhoods have at least one abandoned home that is caught in a system that takes years to clear. Presently, the Town of Clarence has 29 structures under some form of enforcement action for property maintenance violations due to abandonment. There are more under review that probably will enter the Town system soon. We consider these properties as “Zombie properties.” The owner of the real property more than likely has abandoned their responsibilities; even if a bank is holding title for the property, the home has fallen into disrepair with little or no response from the that mortgage company on property upkeep.

Additionally, there are 40 properties in addition to the “Zombie Homes,” that are currently occupied, but have fallen into some form of disrepair or received maintenance complaints that warrants corrections. Residents usually have 30 days to correct the problem before other action is taken.

The Town is enforcing its current laws when these structures fall into disrepair. Most of the time ownership is in flux making it very difficult to obtain compliance when the owner is unknown. Residents must realize these properties, though abandoned, are still private property which inhibits the Town from entering the property for compliance checks and/or hiring contractors to make the property safe.

It takes years to get through the state red tape before a structure can be sold to a new owner. The current state foreclosure laws are premeditated to keep home owners in their home for years after they fail to pay their mortgage or tax obligations. There are efforts by state officials to change legislation to streamline the process when it's obvious the owner has abandoned the house. I am working with the Town legal department to make sure The Town of Clarence has the most progressive laws to keep these abandoned structures as complainant and safe as possible for our neighborhoods. The Town will do everything in its power to demolish any structure that falls in such disrepair that it is a hazard to its neighborhood and the residents that live there.

I review the Zombie homes with Town Engineer Tim Lavocat almost weekly for status updates and to see if other action can be taken through our legal department to lessen the burden to the neighborhoods they are in. Councilmen Paul Shear, liaison to the planning board, is working with the Board for possible new Town Laws that will help lessen the burden to our neighborhoods on these structures.

On a happier note Next Saturday is Day in the Park. For over thirty years this event has helped over 15 Town volunteer groups raise money for their organizations. At this year's Day in the Park, the Town 2030 Comprehensive Plan will be available for review and comment at the Club House. Please take the time to visit and see the development direction Clarence will be taking for the next 15 years.